

What Makes Your Brain Tick

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/33299233) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/33299233>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Video Blogging RPF
Relationship:	Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)
Character:	Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF), GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - College/University , College , Practice Kissing , Roommates , Clay Dream-centric (Video Blogging RPF) , Inexperienced GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Dialogue , Heavy , Friends to Lovers , Fluff , Flirting , Tension , First Kiss , Kissing , Making Out
Language:	English
Collections:	MCYT , August 2021 DSMP Fic Exchange , dsmp fics !!!
Stats:	Published: 2021-08-17 Words: 13000

What Makes Your Brain Tick

by [isntitcrazy](#)

Summary

So he didn't get it.

And honestly, why did Dream ever expect him to understand? When faced with a man who had apparently *never* been kissed before, Dream had been a fool for assuming he'd see intricacies through his intentional vagueness.

Even if every breath tasted of bitter cold and leftover ashes, Dream forced himself to spill the truth of a matter that George couldn't predict.

"The point of the game is that I kiss you."

George has never been kissed before. Dream offers to play a game with him in an effort to change that.

Notes

this fic is like 3 days late but we're not gonna talk about that

practice kissing dnf yay ! dilly i hope you like it also i have never written practice kissing before but now i want to write. more of it. and society can never have too many practice kissing fics SO

anyways enjoy :] i didn't proofread it because get it out of my sight so i hope i didn't spell

anything wrong

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Dream's roommate was really pretty.

It was something he'd noticed on the very first day they met. Back when they had their first interaction in the doorway to their dorm room when the boy had boxes under his arms, laughing at the way he'd had to kick the door when his hands were full; at the way he could only rely on hope that his roommate was somewhere inside.

Dream had stepped to the side with enough space to let him in, the question for his name dancing on the surface of his tongue. He shut the door once they were both inside, hanging onto the curled pink edges of his laugh and the way he said "*George*" with that too-enthralled accent.

Perhaps it was shallow, but the first thing Dream had noticed about him was just how cute he was. The way his tawny eyes glowed and the matching tones of his hair spilling over his forehead, the bright ivory of his smile and the strawberry pink of his lips. When they had been standing so close to each other in the doorway, Dream could've counted the freckles on George's cheeks where they sat beneath his eyes.

He was so bright in the very existence of himself, dumping boxes onto the surface of a once-empty desk but not until he'd asked Dream which one was his just to make sure. And he'd made his bed with a pale pink comforter, hung posters on the walls adorned with soft flowers and painted honeybees; never wore anything but the softest clothes Dream had ever seen, both in color and in feeling when he ran his fingers over the sweaters he left out on his mattress.

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Dream wanted to thread his fingers through George's hair, wanted to borrow his oversized crew necks even if they wouldn't have fit properly, wanted to smell the cologne that wasn't his off the collar and be consumed by the showering pink of his roommate's marble hands. He wanted a lot of things, but he supposed he was content to sit across the room and merely watch him instead.

And oh, did he *watch*. Paid attention to a level that could've been considered excessive, noticing all the little things about George that he shouldn't have known without being told.

Like the way he drew hearts in the corners of his notes with glittering pink gel pen, or that he folded his socks down over the lips of his high tops when he wasn't wearing jeans, or that his ears were pierced twice in each ear, that all his belts were white and his favorite one had a heart-shaped buckle or, most notably, that his lips were always bitten red and chapped.

Maybe he should've been concerned. But he already knew that George was a chronic lip-biter; apparently, he used to be a nail-biter, but he forced himself to stop when he started painting them instead. That was something Dream knew because George had actually *told* him, but only after he commented on how pretty the white of his roommate's nails were.

So Dream never commented on George's lips, no matter how bitten to hell they always looked to be. He pretended he couldn't see it, kept the concern he harbored hidden deep at the center of his chest because he knew it wasn't his business. And it didn't *have* to be his business; the only thing that had to be was Dream keeping his eyes to himself.

It was when the two of them were alone in their dorm one night that Dream's self-control started to slip out the window. When moonlight spilled in through picture-covered glass and the stars were swallowed by the city's light pollution, it was easy to get lost and sleepy enough to say things that may have been regrettable come the sun's light and a clearer head.

Strangely, it made Dream think of his own sobriety. Of the time that George had dragged him to a frat party no matter how out of character it had felt then, when Dream had taken so many shots his head felt dizzy and he nearly said all the things he'd wished to say; especially when George looked at him with a haze in his eyes that was only amplified by the party's blurring lights.

Lips had come too close when they both felt drenched in cheap alcohol. Dream stopped himself when he knew George would forget come morning, splitting headaches and aching limbs the only reminders left by daylight. He'd watched the brunet drink far too much for someone who was planning on keeping their memories, so he kept the taste of mint chapstick to himself when he nearly passed out on the sidewalk outside their dorm building.

But on this moon-struck night, Dream was sober. He may have been tired in a way that reminded him of dim lights and clouded memories, but he was sober. And maybe that would make things easier to regret when hindsight took a turn at the front of his mind, but that was something Dream couldn't possibly know until the moment had already passed.

He sat on his bed with his thoughts. Back against the headboard and eyes on his laptop, though the bright light of his glowing screen felt too far away to see. Even if George was truthfully a greater distance where he sat on his own half-lofted bed, he felt far nearer to Dream's racing mind than the work displayed in front of him; socked feet dangled over the edge of a pink-covered mattress, lithe hands fiddling with something unseen in his lap.

They'd been silent for a comfortable amount of time, the wrap of quiet around their limbs welcome in presence and, perhaps, even encouraged. Dream took it as a moment to appreciate that he got to share space with George, even if the boy was distracting him from the homework he was meant to be doing by just *sitting there*. It was still nice to know that George was in the same room as him, nothing more than a few feet away from the edge of Dream's very own mattress.

Tonight, though, Dream's mind was alright. He couldn't help but try and stare in a way that was subtle enough to go unnoticed, eyes dancing between whatever important thing was being displayed across his laptop screen then and where his roommate sat absently, *cluelessly* across the room from him. He wasn't paying any attention to Dream. George was lost in his own little world, the only reminder that he was sitting there at all being the occasional crack of his knuckles.

There was a part of Dream that wondered what he was even doing over there. He couldn't bring himself to look long enough or in the right place to figure it out, fleeting vision favored on the pink of his lips where they were parted over quiet breaths

His lips. Lips, lips, *lips*. Dream had come to know himself as someone who couldn't take his eyes off George's mouth, at least not when he could get away with it. And in that moment—when his work was too boring and the world was too quiet—Dream found that George's lips looked far worse than he remembered them being.

They were still pretty, ~~kissable, even~~ and perfect pink. But they looked bitten raw, and even if Dream had already acknowledged that his roommate had a penchant for digging ivory into glossy pink, he couldn't stop the threads of worry from digging into his tan skin.

A mix of concern and loopy intoxication at the hands of the moon stripped Dream of the unstable filter on his mouth. And he let himself stare unapologetically when his lips were parting, questions

dancing at the tip of his tongue that he nearly wanted to swallow just to make it feel easier.

But Dream had never been easy. The moon was argent in complication, and so was he.

"George," he started, gaining the brunet's attention in the quick lift of his head. "Can I ask you a weird question?"

He'd nearly stuttered out what he really wanted to ask, though he wasn't even sure how to phrase it just then. And George's incredulous expression certainly wasn't helping; attention newly placed on Dream and unwavering, eyebrows raised with an anticipation to match the strain in his voice when he spoke.

"How weird is *weird*?"

Desperate for comfort from himself, Dream gave a nervous laugh and pushed a hand through his hair. He tried to shrug from his slumped position against the headboard, eyes temporarily leaving George's when he cast his glance to the door of their room.

"I don't know," he answered when no other words felt right. "I just," Dream sighed, "it feels like something I can't ask without warning you."

When he finally looked back toward George—his once casual posture gone rigid, sitting up straight with his back scarcely touching the wall anymore—the questioning look in his eyes hadn't ceased.

"So I shouldn't be worried?"

Dream laughed again, desperate to eradicate the tension where it still lingered in the air. He couldn't tell if it was working or not.

"No, um," he grinned, sheepish, "I just don't want to make you uncomfortable."

A beat of silence strained heavy between them. Dream wondered if it was all in his head, or if thickness in tangerine could be felt on George's bare skin, too; it left marks like bed sheets after a poor night's sleep, and Dream saw them where they curled over his forearms.

"Oh, well, thanks," George's cheekbones were turning pink, but he scoffed like he was pretending they weren't. "I guess."

Apricot took hold of Dream's wrists. Uncomfortable questions weighed just as much on the flat of his tongue as the air did on his shoulders, rapt attention given to the way chocolate eyes couldn't seem to sit still.

"You can just ask the question," George rushed, words spilling past his lips like he was scared of them.

Dream could only theorize on what George was thinking; what he could possibly be assuming in that pretty little head of his, what conclusions were drawn up in all the notebooks cast invisible to Dream.

Glaringly, he knew he just had to ask the question. Per George's request and to quell the burning weight in his mouth, to expel the hellish thoughts in his mind before they danced any closer to skin.

"Are your..." he gestured through his hesitation, thick fingers drawing circles in the air around his mouth, "are your lips okay?"

George blinked. In a wash, half the vivid anxiety on his face dripped off onto his mattress, replaced instead by all the curiosity and questioning he'd worn before Dream's hesitation. Eyebrows raised with strain, and Dream bit his lip as harshly as he could without bleeding.

"Huh?"

Like fire, Dream tried to laugh again. It drew past his lips with more nerves than it ever had before, barely audible through shuddered breath.

"I know you said you bite them a lot," Dream prefaced, "but they've looked, like, *really* bad recently."

He tried to laugh again. George didn't return his branded amusement, eyebrows furrowing with a different shade of confusion and the press of two fingers against his chapped lips.

Eyes no longer danced. And though they'd once stared at Dream in a wait for words to come, they now looked down at pale pink bed sheets where they creased beneath his legs.

"Have they?" he asked, voice scarcely above a whisper.

Maybe this question had been too weird.

Surely, it wasn't normal to ask college roommates how their lips were faring after being bitten to hell and back. Surely, Dream wasn't meant to be paying that much attention to George's mouth of all things—but he was, and maybe he always had been.

Even still, the curls of silver-laden apricot demanded his defense. And he could think of a thousand reasons why he felt the need to defend himself, even if George's reaction was free of discomfort and instead laced with disbelief.

"I don't know," Dream hurried to say, swallowing another nervous laugh where it lay on his tongue. "Maybe you're used to it. They just look really chapped."

As if to emphasize that point, George rolled his bottom lip between his teeth. It was already colored in pastel carmine and peeling skin, leaving Dream to assume the ivory would make him hurt.

But George laughed—more polite than amused, but giddy nonetheless—shifting slightly where he sat atop his bed.

"I mean," he laughed again, "they're always chapped."

Though George was impenetrably correct in that statement, Dream still felt bad when he looked at all the bite marks in his lips. He sank his own teeth into the flesh of his lower lip, felt the nervous dig that came with sharpness in spiking ivory, and for a moment he could understand why George bit at himself so often.

Options weighed in the confines of his head. Dream considered moving on and pretending he'd never said anything, and he considered changing the topic, and he considered shrugging with admittance to George's correctness.

He chose option four.

"Do you want to borrow some chapstick?"

Thick and taut like liquid amber, Dream could scarcely breathe through the silence strung between them. He elected to hold every breath hostage in his lungs, confined to the spaces between his ribs where honey sept through his words.

It was earnest. And Dream could tell based on the etch in his roommate's face that George didn't believe as such.

"You're okay with that?" he questioned with bitter concern. "Like, me using your chapstick?"

Dream almost wanted to laugh. But he didn't, choosing instead to pull his lip out from where it had re-situated itself between his teeth and raise a lone eyebrow.

It was funny, but not funny enough to keep Dream from suppressing his grin. How unsure George looked, the soft concern in his eyes, the way tangerine looked so alight against the alabaster of his skin.

"Um, yeah?" With casual finality, Dream huffed out a laugh. "I wouldn't have offered if I wasn't."

Pale pink imbued itself into the skin of George's face, blossoming beneath his scattered freckles in taut hues of embarrassment. Dream wanted to laugh again, but he swallowed the noise when George's cheeks flushed darker.

"I know, just..." he sighed with an air of frustration, "whatever. Just checking."

Flight eyes danced around the room, tracking every last inch of the walls down to the twinkling stars outside their window. And Dream followed his every move, from the cross of his arms over his chest to the fidget of his legs against bed sheets—colored a hue that no longer matched the petals beneath George's skin, cheeks gone too dark to call the color *similar*.

"Sorry," George whispered when Dream didn't say anything, and the blond felt his spine stick straight.

"Don't apologize!" he hurried to reassure, pulling his body away from the headboard through ever-present tension. "Just tell me what flavor you like, I probably have it."

So he sat up, laptop teetering precariously on his thighs as he leaned over to reach the set of drawers beside his bed. And he paused with one hand on the handle, looking over at George in a wait for his inevitable answer, watched him bite the lips that had even been the cause of this conversation in the first place.

"I don't care," is what George settled on, unhelpful as ever. "Give me whatever you think will help the most."

Dream pondered that for a moment. *Whatever he thinks will help the most.* He is not an expert when it came to lip balm, even if there was an unholy amount of it hiding in his top drawer. So instead of properly listening to George's request, Dream rifled through the drawer in search of his own personal preference.

He could feel George's watchful gaze on him from all the way across the room. It could've just been impatience, or the knowledge that Dream was in search of something *for him*, and it felt tense no matter what it was.

"Okay," Dream said finally, pulling his hand up out of the drawer, "this one is my favorite. I like the strawberry kind, and I do have it in other flavors, so if the formula works and you want to try something different let me know."

Leaning over the edge of his bed, Dream held the tube of chapstick out to George. And he had to get halfway off his bed to come take it from Dream, fingertips brushing against Dream's palm for a second; it was barely long enough to feel, but it set tan skin ablaze with all its power.

George retreated with color-darkened cheeks. Though they couldn't match his bed sheets any longer, they could match the color of strawberries on the chapstick in his hand.

"Alright," he acknowledged, sinking back down into his mattress. "Uh, thank you, Dream."

Flashing him a smile bright enough to outlive the moon, Dream set his hands back in their place on his keyboard.

"No problem. Let me know how it works out."

George nodded softly, and the diversion of Dream's unyielding attention felt forced if nothing else. But he dragged his eyes back to the glowing screen in front of him, left George alone in his peripheral vision where he uncapped the chapstick tube and slid it across his lips.

Dream wanted to stare. He *really* wanted to stare. Enthralling as it was, he knew he couldn't let his gaze linger on George too long; though he certainly saw it in his head, the way slim fingers wrapped around plastic and gave pretty pink lips a paradoxical matte-shine.

If Dream had kissed him then, he would've tasted strawberries. And clearly, he knew exactly what the chapstick between George's fingers tasted like, but he had suspicions that it would taste better off the brunet's bitten lips.

Not that he was thinking about kissing his roommate. That would be weird.

So he tried once more—already tasting failure on the bitter tip of his tongue—to distract himself with the flicker of his laptop screen, swiping fingers over the touchpad when the screen dimmed inevitably. Work was disinteresting, and it would've been boring if he were alone but it felt even more like a drag when George was there and looking at him.

George was looking at him.

And he spoke suddenly, the pinkish curl to his voice piercing through silence like sunset.

"It's nice."

Startled, Dream only blinked. "What?"

When he looked over at George once more, he was giving him an incredulous look. Strawberry chapstick was still held against his palm, presented to Dream like an answer; it was.

"The chapstick you gave me," George supplied, waving the hand it was held in minutely. "It's nice."

Idiocy nearly blinded Dream to his own answer, but he cleared his throat in the midst of overcoming embarrassment.

"Yeah?" he prompted, ignoring the obvious strain in his voice. "Works?"

George laughed with a nonchalance that Dream couldn't have matched if he tried, hand dropping down into his lap where he inspected the label carefully. It tore his eyes away from Dream, and perhaps that let the blond breathe easy for the first time in a little too long.

“Way better than any other brand I’ve tried.”

Despite the honesty in his statement, George’s tone was lighthearted. Pulled taut with mirth and easy lilt, half a smile lingered on his face.

“Good, that’s good,” Dream muttered with a nod, tapping his fingers against the side of his laptop absently. “Do you like the strawberry? I think that brand has, like,” he thought for a moment, “cherry. And pink lemonade, if you like that.”

“Pink lemonade?” George questioned without thought, heavy accusation pulling at the edges of his words.

And Dream was silent for a moment, tasting apricot and twilight in the air. Fingers curled nervously against the gliding surface of his laptop, lingering beneath his keyboard in a space created without use.

“Yeah?” he whispered, the pitch in his voice bordering on unrecognizable.

“Sorry,” George said with a laugh, striking in comparison to the earnest apology from earlier. “That’s just a weird flavor to think of so quickly.”

Dream shrugged, because he knew the reason why he knew it so well; of course he did. He’d agree with George under any other circumstance—pink lemonade *was* a weird flavor to think of so quickly, but it was one that had been ingrained into the front of his mind before he’d had enough time to realize it.

“One of my exes used to like it,” he answered with an ease that felt feigned. “He was, like, *always* wearing it.”

“Oh,” George muttered, and Dream figured the conversation would end there.

So he gave intent to the drift of his attention, attempted to feign interest in his work and the aimless glide of fingertips over his keyboard. But his gaze was easy to steal; especially when George was the one doing the taking, especially when he’d barely given any thought to the work he was meant to be doing at all.

And really, George could’ve said anything to pull Dream’s attention away. He didn’t *have* to say something jarring enough to make Dream’s vision edge carmine, but he did anyway.

“Can you actually taste people’s chapstick off their lips?”

Dream sputtered for a moment, gasping for breath in a way he hoped could fly under the radar. When he looked over at George, he appeared more curious than he did embarrassed, which gave Dream some hope for his own self-preservation.

“*What?*”

The shrug George gave in return was subtle in sheepishness. And his eyes fell to the floor for a single fleeting moment, breathy amusement in pale stains on those strawberry-coated lips.

“Like, your ex,” he supplied. “Did his lips taste like...” and his cut eyebrows furrowed for a moment like he was hesitant, nose scrunching at the bridge with the fold of his scattered freckles. “Like pink lemonade chapstick?”

Even if he didn’t really want to, Dream let himself slip back to the past for a moment. It wasn’t like

his ex was *bad*; he was perfectly fine, and they'd ended on good enough terms that Dream figured running into him now wouldn't be half bad. He was just strangely opposed to revisiting things that had ended, something sourced by his own distaste for bittersweet tunes that linger like stuck honey.

He only dug up old memories for the sake of the question. And because he reminisced with every sense, Dream could feel the tang of false lemonade on the front of lips.

"I mean, usually," he said with a shrug. "Unless we had just woken up or something."

It was true. True enough that Dream could *still* taste pink lemonade on his lips then, true enough that it was the one of the only flavors Dream didn't keep in his drawer. Because he was almost always wearing the stuff—not because his lips were particularly chapped, just because he liked the flavor—and Dream had never picked the guy up from his house without sweet lemon lies on his matching pink lips.

George, however, did not seem inclined to believe him.

"Really?"

Dream could only blink for a moment. And surprised didn't even describe the half of it; neither did confused, though Dream certainly tried to make sense of himself with a few simple adjectives.

"Uh, yeah?"

He wanted to laugh, but he spared George the assumed humiliation. He resolved himself to watch the realizations set in his roommate's chocolate-honey irises, drops of sweet sugar in a rush all the way to the chiffon of his scleras.

Dream still smiled, lopsided and in amusement, sharpened canines on display behind the gaps in his lips where George wasn't looking. Because the brunet seemed distracted again, with eyes cast down to the floor and tongue flicking over the flesh of his lips; presumably in an attempt to taste the strawberry off himself.

"You put it on your lips, George," Dream said accusingly, allowing gentle curls of laughter to slip up through his words. "Of course you can taste it when you kiss."

With a dull frown, George touched two fingers to his bottom lip.

"Oh," he spoke softly. "I guess I didn't realize the flavor was strong enough."

Dream had to swallow another peal of misplaced laughter. Though he still looked at George like he'd said the craziest thing in the world, sitting up from where he'd gone lax against his headboard.

It almost felt ridiculous, how little George seemed to know about things Dream had thought to be so simple—especially for someone the same age as him, especially for a boy he'd seen walk out the door of their room in chase of parties and cheap vodka sodas.

"Have you never, like, gone on a date?" Dream pressed, words stinging sour on the tip of his tongue. "Put on chapstick because you think they might kiss you?"

George only blinked. Sitting on the other side of the room, back pressed against the farthest wall, he felt a thousand miles away; Dream could feel a distance growing between them even if neither boy moved, shifting legs on wrinkled sheets spilling tension all across their tight-muscled shoulders.

“Have you?”

It came out quiet. And it took Dream a moment to process the words, violet nerves evident in George’s voice when he spoke. Everything about it dared to catch Dream off guard, knitting his eyebrows together with rapt confusion and startled interest.

“Yeah?” he spoke with disbelief in the undertow, eyes careful in the gaze placed atop George’s face. “I used to bring chapstick to all my dates in high school.”

He tried to remain nonchalant, and though the spaces between his bones felt casual and at ease, his mind was alight with far too many racing thoughts. It felt like a competition; which words would beat out the others, if he was ruled by disbelief or ease or confusion, perhaps his tangled veins were run by everything in between.

George’s face turned pink under his watchful eyes, color blooming outward beneath constellations of freckles as his gaze fell forward to the floor space between them.

“Oh,” he whispered. “I guess I just...” thoughts were lurid enough to spill across alabaster cheekbones and twisted lips, “haven’t kissed that many people.”

Dream nearly sputtered. He caught himself at the part of his lips, sharpened gasps prodding at the back of his throat when he was wrought by disbelief. He spoke without thought, eyes all over George when he spit accusations in the direction of his curling nerves.

“You’re kidding.”

Dark eyes shifted with lightning speed, and George was staring over at Dream in splayed confusion.

“What?”

“You’re kidding,” Dream repeated. “How many people have you kissed?”

Moment’s silence felt eternal. And it drew out between them in thick twirls of tangerine, shadowed and worrisome when it lasted longer than Dream could manage.

He shifted uncomfortably against the headboard. Perhaps that was another question in need of preface, fair warning to how intrusive and strange it was—especially when Dream was scarcely anything more than George’s roommate, when it felt out of place to be asking such personal questions.

George’s slight shift on the bed seemed to reassure all of Dream’s worry. And his gaze was fleeting in every place it landed, no matter if it was on the wall or the floor or even (and especially) on his roommate himself.

“Um,” he sputtered, strawberry-laden lips rolling between his teeth.

Dream hurried for reassurance, words spilling past his lips in a fluttered mess when hands waved defensively in George’s direction.

“You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to!” he insisted, but George only shrugged.

“No, it’s fine.” And he laughed, though every last inch of his amusement was laced thick with bitter nerves. “Just, like,” he paused again, huffing out another sorry excuse for amusement when he finally landed on the answer he may have been dreading. “None.”

Dream couldn't swallow exclamations before he spit them out.

"None?"

Those umber eyes had never been so quick to find viridian, spread wide in pools of darkness that dared to reflect the moonlight so beautifully. In all his sterling glory, Dream could hardly believe the answer he dared to give; *none*.

He had to be kidding, right? Dream almost felt rude for refusing to believe it, but there was *no way* George hadn't kissed anyone yet. Not with those lips—chapped as they are—not with that pretty face, not with that attitude and liquor-brimmed tongue or the way he spoke when the sun disappeared beyond the horizon.

But every last piece of his body language promised to secure his words in honesty, from the awkward fidget of his hands in his lap to the way he could barely hold Dream's eye.

"Is it really that weird?" he asked meekly, voice barely above a whisper and nearly inaudible from where he was sitting across the room.

And Dream gave the best answer he could muster. "Not objectively."

It still dragged confusion all across George's face, fleeting eyes finding purchase within Dream's for a moment.

"What does that even mean?"

He still sounded so nervous—unsure but curious, perhaps feeling the need to tread lightly around Dream with a fear for his next words. Dream could only hope that his roommate didn't fear judgement, hope that he didn't already feel judged; in all honesty, he wasn't being judged. Dream had just gotten far too distracted by his own shock to consider words before they all ran into the cracks in his lips.

"I just," Dream's face etched deep in thought, quiet huffs of breath hitting the air when he considered himself. "I don't know, you look like someone who's been kissed before."

"What?"

Attempted explanations had only brought more confusion with them, though Dream wasn't quite sure exactly how to elaborate. There was just *something* about George, something that had led Dream to believe that he'd been kissed hard enough to lose himself in a tangle.

He tried to rationalize his own thoughts again, tried to blame it on assumed frat parties and the smell of cigarettes on George's collarbones when he came home too late for Dream to still be awake. He blamed pink-turning cheeks whenever Dream had mentioned ex-lovers, he blamed the hesitance in George's fingertips when he took strawberry chapstick from his palm, he blamed the way he looked when he was asleep and how golden the morning sun bathed his skin.

He blamed everything he could get his hands on. None of the words he discovered felt justifiable enough, but he tried his hand at explanation despite that.

"You just..." and he still hesitated, "I don't know what it is about you. Maybe it's just your lips."

Breath caught momentarily in bruise-begging throats, and the sharpness in George's movements was nearly enough to catch Dream off guard. He had always watched George with rapt interest, had always paid attention that could be labelled *a little too close* and tried to remain apologetic, though

the verdant in his eyes cried out to be greedy.

And that moment would promise to be like any other, with a claiming gaze that skated over alabaster skin and strawberry lips. Dream watched his roommate through the cover of darkness, made out the hinted glow of his features through the silver light of the moon.

George blinked at him. Through night skies and long lashes, Dream could barely make out the look in his eyes. And the brunet whispered like his words were that of secrets.

“Do you look at my lips often?”

Dream swallowed, thick and heavy with gliding apricot hues. It felt like a peach pit lodged in the center of his throat, pushing with sharpened corners and edges at the softness of his flesh.

For a moment, words failed. And though he tried to choke them out before asphyxiation took him away, there was difficulty within his every waking move. The way George was watching him with wide eyes—a painful need for answer overriding the nerves that made him want to look away—nothing could have been more difficult than speech.

The short answer was undoubtedly *yes*. So that was what Dream whispered under his breath, unapologetic confirmation pulling a gasp out from George’s throat.

And in their moment’s silence, Dream thought about far too many things. From all the times *he’d* been the one to stumble in through doors far too late in the night, when it had been his skin stained by second-hand smoke and the taste of melon and menthol left on the flat of his tongue. There was time spent in circles on rough carpet floor, time spent pretending there wasn’t a world outside of dirty walls and stained carpet or the cheap beer in red solo cups.

Options weighed on the scales in Dream’s head. When he was stuck staring at the taffy-pink embarrassment laid sticky over George’s skin, he could barely tolerate the silence in the air between them.

“How about we play a game.”

George managed to look even more perplexed than he had all night, all raised eyebrows and tensed fingers. But there was an edge of curiosity to his expression, prodding in near-silence when Dream had never bothered to elaborate.

“A game?” he questioned, and Dream managed a nervous laugh.

“I know it sounds, like, childish or whatever,” he scoffed, more at himself than anything, “but it’s not, I promise you.”

Briefly, the stark look on George’s face pitched darker. Then he leaned forward with careful interest, back pulling away from the wall he was leaning on when legs crossed and elbows collided with knees. He leaned his chin against two pressed palms, blinking at Dream when he awaited the answer to the question still curling away from the tip of his tongue.

“Okay,” he started. “What’s the game?”

And Dream nearly regretted even bringing it up in the first place. Because of course, he’d had a game in mind when he even opened his mouth in the first place, and of course, he’d barely thought his idea through before he made a proposition.

Absently, he considered coming up with a completely different game right then and there;

pretending that there was never anything else to be thought of—it wasn’t like George could’ve known. But he was rushing prefaces before he could think of a secondary game, nervous laughter hiding beneath his words in the same shade as the blush on his cheeks.

“Uh, well, it’s—wait,” his breath shook with a nervous inhale, “I just want you to know that you’re allowed to say no. We don’t have to play.”

George raised an eyebrow. “Okay?”

“Yeah,” he huffed when he didn’t know what else to say, eyes flicking between George and the screen of his laptop that had finally flickered off.

Once again, Dream tried to laugh his nerves away. And he shut his computer so he could push it off to the side, leaving it beside his pillow and out of sight. When he looked back over at George, his roommate somehow managed to look *even more* confused than he did before.

“Well, come over here,” he tapped his hand against the mattress space in front of him, “and sit on my bed.”

Despite the hesitance laid all across George’s face and aching body language, he was getting up off his bed. Sock-clad feet hit the floor with the softest sound, eyebrows still furrowed in minuteness as he approached the edge of Dream’s mattress.

And he paused. Fingers grazing unkempt sheets, eyes narrowed in hesitant wait, feet risen up to stand on toes like he *did* plan to climb up the half-loft of the bed.

“Dream,” he said with nervous sternness, juxtaposition laid thick in the word. “Can you tell me what the game is?”

He had one last chance to lie. One last chance to pretend like the thought in his head had never existed, and he spent the moments leading up to his awaited answer digging crescent moons into his palms and watching George lift himself up onto the bed.

Sitting across from Dream cross-legged, George still wore all the same hesitant patience as he had before. And Dream cleared his throat.

“I want you to guess what flavor chapstick I’m wearing.”

Despite a desperate want to screw his eyes shut and feign blindness, Dream kept his gaze locked on George. And though he could’ve expected a thousand different reactions from the boy seated across from him on the bed, he did not expect George to *laugh*.

But he did. With the lightest dust of pink seated high atop his cheekbones, George laughed in saccharine sweetness that glistened like sugar on his strawberry lips.

Dream couldn’t see what was so funny. And the anxiety wreaking havoc on the pathways in his veins still refused to settle, even if he hadn’t sent George running out the door.

“What?” George questioned finally, laughter dwindling in favor of toned accusation. “But you have, like, a million different chapsticks. I’ll *never* guess which one you’re wearing.”

Oh. *Oh*.

So he didn’t get it.

And honestly, why did Dream ever expect him to understand? When faced with a man who had apparently *never* been kissed before, Dream had been a fool for assuming he'd see intricacies through his intentional vagueness.

Even if every breath tasted of bitter cold and leftover ashes, Dream forced himself to spill the truth of a matter that George couldn't predict.

"The point of the game is that I kiss you."

He waited with bated breath for George's reaction. Felt the deep temptation to shut his eyes and ignore the realization settling on his roommate's face, combatted it with the hope for nothing plaguing.

George only lost his breath for a moment.

"Oh."

Somehow, that was worse than running away.

"We don't have to play if you don't want to!" Dream said in a hurry, a rush to do away with the lost look in George's eyes and his too-painful silence.

In the three seconds left open, George didn't speak. Dream tried to smile through his barely-shaking lips, washed his face in all the kindness he could muster and tried to gauge his roommate's scarce reaction.

"It was just an idea, I don't know," he laughed with bitter tangerine, and his nerves did not bring the same sugar as George's amusement. "I thought it could be fun. I used to play it at parties, and stuff."

Tension clouded the air between them, thick enough to be cut with a knife. Dream almost wished he had a blade in his hand then—anything to quell the stagnant silence that had found space in their room, cut by nothing within close enough proximity; not even the argent light of a glowering moon.

"No, it's fine," George reassured in whisper, "you just caught me off guard."

There were a thousand other ways that could have gone—a thousand other things George could've said in place—and Dream figured that all of them would've been worse than the truth.

A light laugh in stained strawberry barely settled Dream's nerve. And he bit his own unflavored lip, still wishing distantly that it could feel like waxy sugar.

"Sorry," he muttered. "I don't want to steal your first kiss or anything, I just thought that making it a game would like..." eyebrows furrowed, and Dream wondered what the hell he even *was* thinking, "relieve some of the pressure, I guess."

Perhaps that is what he thought. And it made sense in the stains on his lips, words soft when he worried and strained through bitter carmine.

"Yeah, it probably would," George answered in breath, nodding vaguely; it was more to himself than it was to Dream. "And you could like, teach me."

The air in Dream's lungs rushed out with startling quickness. He spoke without thought, prodding at pastel-shaded wounds he could barely see in skin.

“Teach you?” he questioned, and those moonlit eyes glanced up to find Dream’s again.

George inched closer, body sliding gently across the mattress. It left the two of them with their knees nearly touching, not quite enough space pitted between them—Dream could feel the heat radiating off his roommate’s skin, trails of whispered flame licking up freckled skin in minuteness.

He watched George watch him. It didn’t feel as uncomfortable as it should’ve, though he still fidgeted under watchful eyes.

“I’ve never kissed anyone before,” George said again, his reminder far more confident than first admittance. “Teach me how, Dream.”

Though Dream could’ve read the implications of *teach me* from a thousand miles away, the confirmation in George’s twirling accent still made his breath hitch. It felt like a secret, something he wasn’t meant to hear despite being the only other person in the room;

And he gazed into a pair of unblinking eyes—painted honeycomb and sparkling by the light of the moon outside their window—searching rather pathetically for any hints of dishonesty. He came up empty-handed, palms splayed with air between the lines when George looked truthful and sure of himself.

“Yeah, I’ll,” Dream hesitated over his own shaky breath, “yeah. I’ll take the lead, you just… guess chapstick flavors.”

With a nod aimed more at himself than at George, Dream reached over the bed to find his nightstand drawer again. It tugged open with the sound of rolling plastic, nonsense flavors knocking against each other in the loose space of his drawer.

And he’d watched George leave the tube of strawberry chapstick he’d given him swaddled in baby pink sheets, but he knew anyways that known flavors would serve to ruin the game; he carded his hand through a drawer full of something he had too much of, tried not to think or apologize when he bumped knees with George in their proximity.

When he gathered a sufficient handful of random lip balm—some of which he’d surely forgotten he even owned—Dream settled right back where he was. His back no longer held a casual lean against the headboard behind him, muscles startled too tense by how nearly he could feel George’s breath on his lips and the promise that in both too much and not enough time, he *would* feel those exhales in his.

He dropped all his chapstick in the space between his legs, looking up at George expectantly. Cheeks burned hot beneath freckled skin, and Dream wondered absently how pink it showed up to George’s eyes.

“I should probably close my eyes,” the brunet wondered aloud, “right?”

Taking a shaky breath, Dream brought himself to nod. Long fingers dragged aimlessly through a pile of chapstick tubes on the mattress, nervous hands shifting in a desperate need to do something for distraction.

“That would be ideal,” Dream muttered, earning a laugh from the boy sitting across from him.

When he furrowed his eyebrows, George only laughed harder.

“What’s so funny?” Dream prodded, though George only shook his head.

“Nothing, oh my god,” he insisted, closing his eyes as promised. “Just kiss me or whatever.”

Dream couldn’t help but hold his breath, resisting the urge to bite his lip when he pulled a random tube of chapstick up off the bed. He barely glanced at the flavor listing before uncapping it, tasting sweet sugar wax when it glided across his lips.

He tasted the same melon he found in bitter menthol—other things he’d passed between lips on the living room floors of dirty frat houses—and when he glanced down at the lip balm in his hand, the bold *watermelon* staring up at him provided confirmation.

And he looked up at George with strain in his raising chin. There he sat, the prettiest boy in the world, eyes closed gently to go with the dust of matching melon pink on his cheeks. He seemed to wait, patient as ever, and Dream couldn’t fathom why it was *his* pulsing veins that ran hot with nerves.

“Why am I nervous?” he wondered aloud, and George laughed with faltering huffs again.

“I don’t know, but stop,” he insisted. “It’s *my* first kiss, Dream, not yours.” He cracked one of his eyes open, half a smirk lifting the corner of his lips. “Apparently you used to do this all the time.”

Dream felt himself flush, a burning heat already present under his skin daring to burn brighter. Though George shut his eye almost as soon as he opened it, Dream still felt undeniably *watched*, though the only thing he could blame it on was the simple presence of his roommate in such unyielding closeness.

“Maybe,” he attempted, “kind of. I don’t know.”

George shook his head again, and Dream was sure that had his eyes been open, he would’ve caught the roll of them just then. With palms laid flat on his knees, George shrugged at the onslaught of his own following words, seeming casual about matters that failed to be his own.

“You’ve got all these stories about tasting pink lemonade off your ex-boyfriend’s lips—”

“—I do *not*—”

“—so can you just stop being nervous and kiss me?”

Scoffing, Dream found himself happy that George had his eyes shut. Not out of the promise of his still-chapped lips or the rose anticipation on his face, but because he knew that his face was redder than it had ever been just at the mere implication of Dream having more experience than George; though it had become something of a well-established fact in the space between them, Dream could barely stomach it.

He shook his head to no one in particular, blond hair tousling in a spill across his forehead. With a huff, he inched forward on the bed.

“Alright,” he whispered, and it felt more like a warning than admittance.

With a still-shaking hand, Dream reached out towards George’s still face. Fingers graced the slope of his chin, urging him just *that much* closer with a closing gap, and Dream almost didn’t want to take away the final inch.

Of course, it was nerves. And it was the feeling of gentle breath against his parted lips, the proximity that allowed him to count every freckle under George’s eyes or see the shadow of his eyelashes on his cheek. It was a million things that he felt unable to do anything about, it was the

fact that George was leaning forward, too; one hand shifted to wrap around Dream's knee instead, and before the blond could catch his breath, George was falling forward with the press of their lips against each other.

It was clumsy and brash, but Dream wouldn't have expected anything less from them. Even if he didn't know it was George's first kiss—even if it wasn't George's first kiss at all—Dream would've expected it to be clumsy.

They met teeth-first, a harsh collide of ivory when their pink lips curled at awkward angles. And George was sitting too high on his knees, fingers wrapped around Dream's knee with digging fingers and heaved leverage. But they readjusted themselves just as quickly as they'd met, the hand tracing George's jaw shifting to catch him around the back of the neck; he was urged closer, pulled forward until their lips were pressed together properly and Dream could taste the skin of George's lips.

And they didn't move. Sat still for a moment with nothing but the essence of the other, with the vague flavor of leftover strawberry tracing the gaps in George's lips and the bite of strawberry etched into Dream's.

He could feel where George's experience lacked, where he was still pushing too hard against Dream's lips when he didn't know what else to do and edging too close in their bumping knees.

So Dream was the first to pull away. The first to pry his eyes open when he couldn't remember closing them, the first to be blinded by the light of a moon he'd managed to forget about and the slowness of George's movements in front of him.

"How did that feel?" he asked, watching the face in front of him as the brunet attempted to recollect himself.

He blinked twice in quick succession. Dragged his tongue over still-parted lips, drew eyebrows together in a barely noticeable click when he tried to taste the matter from his own mouth.

"Weird," was what he settled on, a single word left with unseen intent.

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. He couldn't read the tone of George's simple answer, voice too flat and eyes too fleeting to tell if he was being complimentary or bitter. So he loosened his fingers where they still bordered on his roommate's jaw, acted as though he may pull away at the point he understood truth and honesty.

"Weird?" he prodded when George never elaborated.

Dark coffee eyes managed to find his again. And they spilled with bright white cream, staining irises to honey and sugar softness beneath the light of the moon.

"Your lips are softer than I thought they'd be."

It felt almost...*innocent*. Dream supposed the boy was right—he vaguely remembered having the same thought when he had his own first kiss, he just hadn't been bold enough to voice the words aloud.

But maybe he was just too young to process much of anything—maybe he was *still* too young to process much of anything—leaving him with sardonicism in eloquence and the part of single words in the air.

"Oh."

Strawberry lips cracked into a smile, nervous in essence to match the fuschia tones of his skin. The hand on Dream's knee clenched tighter, fingertips working their way under his skin but shifting without any pain.

For a moment, Dream had forgotten the point of the game. Because they were playing a game in waxed fruit, not kissing for the hell of it at the center of Dream's shitty dorm bed; though they may have been kissing for the hell of it when they both forgot the point.

"What did they taste like?"

His question was breathier than he wanted it to be. Verdant eyes watched as the focus on George's face shifted from reflection to searching.

"Watermelon," he answered, and Dream felt his lips pull into a smile when he was right.

"Yeah, you got it."

And George licked his lips again, perhaps savoring the false sweetness of something stolen from Dream's mouth.

"Tastes nice," he admitted. "Probably better than my first kiss would've been if it wasn't like this."

He laughed with pink amusement, earnest and without nerves—so Dream laughed, too. It mixed in the air with the same taut sunshine as every promise they'd made, the same waxy sugar as the nice-tasting chapstick in question, still staining Dream's lips.

For a moment, the tension in the air seemed to dissipate. Dream felt like he could breathe again, and he was taking in air for long enough to draw his hand away from George's jaw and reach for his mess of chapstick again.

"Okay," he attempted to sound casual, but the breath in his voice stripped him of the very attempt. "I'll do another one."

And he'd already laid fingers on a new flavor of lip balm, one he couldn't read because he wasn't paying very close attention; George's watchful eyes were far more interesting than the chapstick they were meant to be playing games with, questions on the tip of his melon-speckled tongue more intriguing than anything else.

"How are you supposed to get rid of the watermelon?"

Even as the words registered in his brain, Dream still blinked like they hadn't. "Huh?"

Though George seemed flustered by the prospect of elaborating, he moved to do it anyway. Eyes flitted away for a brief moment, catching on the wall like it was anything but dull concrete.

"The taste," he reiterated. "Won't it linger on your lips?"

Dream blinked at him. He'd played this game before—George knew that, he'd told him—and he knew that the taste *would* linger on his lips. And he could rub at his mouth with the back of his hand until he'd effectively slobbered all over his skin and made a fool of himself, or he could do what everyone did back when he used to mess around with chapstick at parties.

But the truth tasted swollen and bitter, so he remained vague when he held a tube of chapstick in the curve of his palm.

“Oh, yeah, it will,” he acknowledged, intentional in the way his words couldn’t be accompanied by anything but a shrug.

He should’ve known that George wouldn’t let it sit at that; he was stubborn, and he was nosy, and he hadn’t let Dream get by on implication since he’d gotten to his place across from him on the mattress.

“How did you get rid of it when you played before?”

Dream bit his lip, tasting the linger of watermelon that he was meant to be getting rid of. He wondered why he even entertained this idea at all—the whole game, the kissing, *all of it*—and briefly, he let himself be swallowed by regret. But he knew when he looked at George’s face that he couldn’t lie to him, because he hadn’t before and there was nothing within himself that felt ready to change that.

The truth tended to taste sweet, even if it wasn’t sugar-saturated enough to stain the melon off his lips.

“If you kiss someone for long enough, it’ll rub off.”

Admittance always came with expectation. And Dream had a lot of expectations, a head full of gauged reactions and half-assed preparation in fear of the real thing.

None of his expectations mirrored reality.

“Then kiss me.”

It wasn’t even just the words themselves—the *declaration*, if Dream dared to label it as such—but the way he said them; confident ease, like he’d done this a hundred times before though Dream knew he never had. It would’ve been intimidating if Dream weren’t so busy being startled, staring near-blankly at George where he sat with the same nonchalance on his face as he wore within his intonation.

“What?”

He asked questions because there was nothing else to do. And he spoke in few words when he worried of the shake in his voice.

“I’m waiting, Dream,” George said plainly. “Kiss me until I can’t taste it anymore.”

At first, Dream moved to wrap his fingers back around George’s jaw. He’d already dropped the chapstick he’d picked up back into the pile by his lap, had already shifted his hand in George’s direction before the hesitation even registered in his twitching muscles.

With faces too close and silences too golden, Dream let his voice collapse into a whisper spilled across George’s lips.

“Are you sure?”

George looked at him like he was an idiot.

“You’re supposed to be teaching me, aren’t you?”

Breath caught in throats for more than just a moment, brevity distilled by nerves and quick-passing time. Dream had lost track of seconds when clocks came to evade him, led by nothing but the

moonlight spilled through too-large windows and the turn of the world in George's wide-open eyes.

"I mean, yeah—"

George cut him off. "So teach me."

Pause. Blunt nails pierced at George's skin, and the brunet didn't complain; his face barely even changed to register presumed pain, umber remaining wide and spreading where Dream stared down at it with inexorable hesitation.

"Okay," he whispered. "Okay, I can do that."

So he leaned in once again, left another kiss on George's sticky-feeling lips that lingered with all the same false melon as before. Though it was the only thing he wanted to do for the rest of the night—kiss George, kiss his pretty roommate until all the breath left his lungs and his eyes could barely open—he reminded himself of the task at hand: *teaching*.

He pulled away. And he swore he heard a whine stick itself in George's throat, but he swore to himself that he had to have made it up.

"When someone is, like, about to kiss you," he attempted to explain, hesitant in the very way he carried himself, "you can kind of tell. If they don't tell you they're about to kiss you, I mean. You just have to watch them."

And he started to lean in again, but the push of George's voice interrupted the motion.

"What are the tells?"

Dream let himself smile slightly, the eagerness in George's voice pulling strings against the corners of his lips. And with his newfound lopsided grin and surged confidence, Dream huffed out a laugh against George's lips.

"Just watch me for a second."

He leaned in again. With a hold on George's chin, he narrowed his eyes to near-shut, held George's gaze until their lips were almost touching and he could taste the spoiled sunrise off the fronts of his roommate's teeth.

Again, he only let it linger for a second. He pulled away with the same familiar sticky sound, something he'd grown used to that he wondered if George was startled by; he looked at George with eyes still narrowed, once shut but for barely a moment as their lips were touching.

"Did you see that?" he asked, and the confusion settling itself atop George's face was anything but promising.

"See what?" he questioned, and Dream almost laughed at how clueless he sounds.

~~Maybe George was lucky he was so fucking pretty.~~

"The way I looked at you, and closed my eyes before I leaned in," he explained, nearly in loathe of the way his voice sounded wrapped around every word. "You should lean in too, then."

Realization settled across George's features in place of perplexion, a lone blink fluttering his eyelids when he stared up at Dream in loss. Palms wrapped around bent knees tightened ever-so-

slightly, whispers finding their place in the air.

“Oh,” he murmured. “Okay. Do it again.”

As Dream moved to lean in once more—head tilting sideways to allow himself a better angle, eyes slipping back to their state of almost-shut—George interrupted him for what felt like the millionth time; really, it couldn’t have been anything more than the third.

“Kiss me for longer this time.”

Dream sputtered. “Huh?”

And the request had shot his eyes wide open, fingers tensing against George’s chin—hopefully, it wasn’t noticeable enough for him to process it.

“For longer,” George repeated. “Kiss me more.”

When Dream didn’t say anything in answer, a new layer of nerves coated George’s skin. And he bit his lip for no longer than a second, catching himself in the middle of the action and halting the nervous tick altogether.

“I kind of...” he kept his voice low, like it was meant to be regarded as a secret. “I kind of like it.”

Perhaps it was a secret.

“Kissing?” Dream prodded, though even he knew it was a stupid question at heart.

“Yeah,” he agreed without hesitation. “Feels nice.”

“It does,” Dream agreed, and he cringed at himself when the words settled in his ears and made him feel like a complete *idiot*.

It wasn’t like George was going to judge him, or anything. His eyes were already shut when he waited, chin angled up toward Dream when he expected another kiss.

As Dream inched closer, all his thoughts got exceptionally louder. Lips bumped for fractions of seconds, sparks beneath flesh bursting with a press against the thickest layer of skin. He felt the need to preface himself again, warnings singing the freckles around his lips to ebon sharpness.

“I’m gonna, like, move my lips,” he warned, “Just follow my lead, okay?”

“Okay,” George whispered. “I trust you.”

His closed eyes served as a testament to that faith. A silent declaration, one to go with the promise he voiced and the even greater up-tilt of his head—one led slightly by the push of Dream’s fingers beneath his chin, an inch closer across the bed when their lips met for what may as well have been the hundred-thousandth time.

Almost in spite of all his inexperience, George’s lips managed to feel familiar. Maybe it was because he tasted like Dream’s chapstick, maybe it was because Dream had already known him before their lips dragged together beneath the light of the moon; he wasn’t like everyone else he’d played this game with, he wasn’t a stranger at a party in the bathroom or on the living room floor.

He wasn’t chasing ignorant cherry off the mouth of some guy he’d met six minutes ago, he wasn’t finding all the sour parts of pink lemonade when he made out with a boy he’d grown tired of.

It was *George*. Sweet, sweet George, who probably would have tasted like candy and saccharine promise even without the buffer of overused chapstick.

So perhaps Dream kissed his roommate with too much meaning. Bled meaning through their lips in seeping fuschia tones, moved his lips with a hasty intent that George may have been too behind to follow. But he kissed Dream back with all the fervor he had in him, shifting mouths against each other when large hands slipped to the backs of heads and tangled dark hair between fingers.

He pulled George harder against himself, spread his lips apart against him and hopes the brunet would follow his lead. And he did, parting lips with the same space between them as Dream had, kissed with all the same shades of pink and luridity to match in tangles of glistening color.

Time ceased to exist more than it already had. Dream felt alone in the world with no one but George, one hand in his hair and the other catching the wrist laid close to his knee, tugging him closer when he lost himself in the moment.

Maybe he was giving too much meaning to the motions of his lips.

“I can’t taste the watermelon anymore,” George said in breath, every word falling into Dream’s mouth when he’d only pulled away enough to speak.

A victorious-feeling grin slid its way across Dream’s lips. “So it worked.”

“Yeah,” George laughed. “It did.”

Though it seemed like both of them wanted to stay there for at least a moment longer—foreheads pressed together, lips mere inches apart and gasping for forgotten breath—they both pulled away when there wasn’t anything else promised to follow.

Dream let his hand fall back into his lap, searching for a new flavor of chapstick while he spoke of anything but.

“And do you get it,” he started, furrowing his eyebrows when George appeared surprised by the question, “kind of?”

“Yeah,” he agreed quietly. “I think I need...” and he hesitated for a second, pause etching itself deep through the creases in his skin, “I think I need more practice.”

Dream raised an eyebrow. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” George repeated, shutting his eyes before Dream could ask anything more. “Try another flavor.”

It wasn’t a request; instead, a demand lingered in place of one. And Dream almost wanted to laugh at how eager he was, two hands back on his own knees when he’d leaned away from Dream just a touch.

Dream could only *act* like he didn’t miss the wrap of George’s palm around his skin, but even he knew he was lying to himself.

“Okay,” he acknowledged, pulling another random flavor out from the pile by his lap.

The second it passed over his lips, he knew it was peach. And he’d always regarded it as one of his favorite flavors—perhaps only second to the strawberry chapstick discarded on George’s bed across the room—so maybe he was excited for George to taste it for himself.

Or maybe he was just excited to kiss George again.

He stopped allowing himself to waste time in mindless worry, instead leaning in to press his lips against George's again. He only lingered there for a second—just long enough to take George's face in his hand again, leading him closer when he still worried for his cluelessness—but it was for no other reason than to let George taste the sweetness of his lips and leave a guess hanging heavy in the air between them.

No other reason. Not even for the teaching he was supposedly providing.

“Peach,” George said, wasting no time between the part of their lips and his guess.

Dream huffed out a laugh, faces still leaned in far too close to be passed off as *for the game*. He wasn’t complaining, and neither was George, so they let their breath linger in tangle where it erupted from parted lips.

“You’re good at this,” he admitted, still laughing quietly beneath words to hold a lighthearted ease.

And George grinned, wide and brighter than the moon. Dream could barely make out the dull shine to his lips or the glow of his bright white teeth when their eyes were so close to each other, and maybe he only saw everything because he was looking for it.

“Kissing or guessing?”

Though he was clearly joking—at least about the first part—Dream still sought honesty.

“Both.”

George leaned away from him slightly in surprise. “Really?”

With a laugh that was more polite than anything, Dream nodded in confirmation. “Really.”

Free of hesitation, George pushed himself even closer than he’d been before he drew away.

“I want you to teach me more,” he requested bluntly, and even if they’d already been kissing for god knows how long, Dream still found himself caught off guard.

Nearly at a loss for words, Dream opted for a clarifying question. “More of the same thing?”

“Yeah,” George said with a nod. “And I don’t—can you teach me how to use tongue?”

And *that* left him at a proper loss for words. Everything but sputtering over forlorn syllables and cluelessness, left without aim in the swirls of darkness that dared to creep up over his shoulders.

Again, as far too many things had, it felt bitterly innocent. Though it was blunt and perhaps *unholy*, Dream could barely manage to find anything but chiffon white.

“Jesus,” he huffed finally, perhaps too breathy for someone leaned so close to another person’s lips.

The hesitation in George’s reaction blossomed immediately. “Too much?”

“No, just unexpected, is all,” Dream rushed to reassure.

He almost felt opposite to himself; caught off guard by something that may have required preface, a taste of his own medicine, perhaps. Decidedly, his medicine tasted like peach chapstick and

pretty boys.

“I can certainly try,” he said with a laugh, because maybe he didn’t trust himself to teach the intricacies of French kissing.

He was no expert, even if he went to parties and pretended to be. Even if the taste of lime and salt made him want to be.

“You’re a good kisser, Dream,” George complimented, and even if it was weighted by the person it came from, Dream still felt the pride in his chest swell. “I think.”

“I’ll take it,” Dream said with a laugh, leaning in closer with the promise of touching lips. “You’re a good kisser too, George.”

And he closed the gap before George could even accept the compliment, tasting the peach of his own chapstick where it had stuck to George’s lips. He almost forgot that was the point of this; chapstick, false fruit flavors, and familiar wax. That it hadn’t been his own intentions that led them to this point, where he was attempting to teach his too-pretty college roommate how to kiss by the means of his own lips on his.

What was he even teaching him for? He elected not to think about it.

Instead, he prodded at the part in George’s lips with the tip of his tongue, spreading them apart with applied pressure and reveling in the way George left himself to Dream’s mercy. And he leaned forward to welcome the intrusion in his mouth, spread lips open wider when hands caught around Dream’s shoulders and tongues pushed together in careful slowness.

Dream had to pull away before he got too lost in himself—too lost in *George’s mouth*—and he had to rush to make excuses when it came to the new space between them, panting lips still close together but not close enough to feel accidental.

“Don’t like, fuck their mouth with your tongue,” Dream advised, and even he felt like an idiot when he said it out loud.

In spite of the shitty angle that came with being pushed so close together, Dream still saw when George’s face turned red.

“Oh my god.” George sputtered, laughter lingering somewhere beneath his exclamation. “You’re shameless.”

“It’s good advice!” Dream defended quickly, earning a proper laugh from his roommate.

“Uh-huh, yeah,” he said with a scoff, the flick of his eyes sarcastic but there nonetheless. “Don’t fuck your mouth with my tongue, got it.”

Dream nearly stumbled when he heard George say *your*, as his own use of non-specific pronouns had been painfully intentional. An attempt at distancing himself from the taste of George’s lips and his words on his tongue before he got too excited or used to the turn things had taken.

George’s choice words had undone all of his already fruitless attempts.

“Oh,” George added absently, “and the peach is gone.”

Dream nodded when he didn’t know what else to do. “Uh-huh.”

“Please kiss me more,” George whispered in plea, and Dream could only laugh again.

“I will,” he promised, “just let me change flavors again.”

He was rifling through the pile of chapstick still in his lap when George shook his shoulders, a quiet whine resting at the back of his throat with obvious impatience. Dream would’ve laughed *again* if it weren’t so painfully endearing.

“Dream,” he said with saccharine insistence, earning him a rather accusatory look from the blond in question.

“Needy,” he said with a lighthearted tone, but the whine in George’s throat threatened to tear the grin right off his face.

Despite all his high-pitched protest, George still shut his eyes. And Dream took his temporary blindness as an opportunity to coat his lips in a new flavor of fruit-dotted wax, moving as quickly as possible so he could get his mouth back on George’s again.

It tasted like red sugar and cherries, so he crashed his lips into George’s before another moment could pass without their mouths slotted against each other. When they got lost in the moment and stayed kissing each other for far longer than was objectively necessary, Dream couldn’t complain, content to let George swallow him whole so long as they were sitting pretty on top of his bed.

Content to be swallowed, content with the arms wrapped firmly around his shoulders and the way George rose to sit up on his knees, content with the fading taste of cherry on their lips and the breathy gasps he could revel in whenever their mouths separated in those brief stints for air.

Again, Dream was the one to pull away. And he wasn’t sure if it had always been him because George didn’t know what he was doing or because he just really wanted to kiss him, but he was certainly left to hope with everything in him that it was the latter.

“You didn’t guess,” Dream whispered into George’s mouth, and he’d swear the answer couldn’t have come any quicker.

“Cherry,” George gasped. “It’s cherry.”

Barely given enough time to smile, Dream confirmed those carmine-colored suspicions. “You’re right again.”

Seemingly, George was having none of it. With a hand that snaked its way up to Dream’s mess of dirty blond hair, he tugged him closer with the brush of ivory teeth against lips not his own.

“I know.”

Lips collided with all the clumsiness of the first time, leaving *Dream* as the one at the mercy of another instead of the other way around; it certainly caught him off guard, perhaps more than George’s request for tongue had, and he pulled away when his breath was lost on him and the laughter in his chest rose up to the cracks in his bitter lips.

“Woah,” he teased with lighthearted anguish, “you’re eager.”

It was a joke shrouded in disguise, hidden shock and awe swallowed by a cloak of tease and making fun. George didn’t even have any room to be embarrassed, reactions few and far between, the expression still laid unmoving on his face having nothing to do with the tone in Dream’s voice and everything to do with the tone in his own.

“I like it,” George insisted. “It feels good.”

Dream laughed again, tease still thick in his amusement and loud enough for George to hear undoubtedly. “I think you already said that.”

“But it does, oh my god,” he everything but sputtered, “Dream, you have no idea, just...” with the shake of his head, George leaned closer, “just stop talking.”

It was a mess, a fucking *mess* of a kiss, but maybe that was what made it the best out of all of them. George tried to lead without warning, tried to copy prior motions made by Dream’s lips but with his own; it was both endearing and half-successful, and Dream loved every second of it.

He could see where the motions had come from, could see what parts of what he’d picked up and made attempts at replicating. But it was messier and more teeth-first and without the same experience that Dream’s lips held, because this was still the first time he was making out with someone whereas Dream had managed to lose count of his own.

So they kissed until Dream couldn’t taste anything but George, kissed until it was nothing but spit and tantalizing slickness laid between them and their bodies were too close to breathe. At some point, George had landed in the center of Dream’s lap, and even without warning or request they both knew it was exactly what they’d wanted.

Hands caught around waists and pulled bodies closer. Dream tried not to smile so hard that their lips fell apart, but he did anyway, and he was whispering against his roommate’s lips even if he didn’t want their mouths to be apart.

“I can’t taste cherry any more.”

George whined again, a sound that was still oh-so pretty and mind-numbing that Dream could’ve made an idiot of himself right then and there. But he resisted, content to laugh quietly when George frowned, squeezing his waist with soft endearment and fondness that couldn’t have been matched with well-declared words.

“Did you want to try another flavor?” he asked, and somehow, the shake of George’s head was unexpected.

“No.”

Worry was the first emotion Dream could think to assign to himself; fear, perhaps. That maybe he’d slipped up and done the wrong thing, that maybe this *had* been more irreversible than once thought and he never should’ve let them get to this point at all.

Deep down, he knew it was a useless fear. But that didn’t stop it from existing, and he made himself ask questions that he wished to run away from before the answer could even find his ears.

“Did you...” he still hesitated, even through necessity, “did you want to stop?”

George was blunt as always. “No.”

“No?” Dream searched for confirmation, and George shook his head again.

“I want to kiss you, like,” he seemed to ponder over a time frame for a brief moment, “forever.”

It was pathetically endearing, and Dream wanted nothing more than to kiss the nervous look on George’s face and wash those red cheeks away. Even if his blush was cute and desirable, even if it

made his face and eyes and freckles look good, he knew that nerves were unquellable and he would've done anything to remedy that.

Perhaps his following words would serve to do anything but. There was no way of telling until they were already laid out between them.

“I think there’s a word for that, George,” he teased, and the grin on George’s face was irreplaceable.

His entire face lit up to match the beam of his smile, glowing ivory falling closer to a golden sun’s ray than the true color behind his lips. And his voice sounded brighter, too, matching in blossomed tones to the spark beyond his lips when he spoke and searched for elaboration.

“Yeah?”

“Uh-huh,” Dream confirmed. “Starts with a ‘b’ ends with a ‘oyfriend’.”

“First you want my first kiss, now you want to be my boyfriend?” George teased in painful roundness, laughing through the gaps between his fingers when a hand covered his lips. “Greedy.”

And Dream laughed, too, because he knew George’s tone was nothing but lighthearted and he couldn’t have feared honesty even if he tried. So he teased right back to match the energy, perhaps not as golden as George was but giddy nonetheless.

“You’re the one who said you wanted to kiss me *forever*.”

George batted at his shoulder playfully. “Yeah, and it’s hard to kiss you when you don’t shut up.”

He let George shut him up. And he’d let George shut him up forever, and ever, and *ever*, until neither of them could breathe through each other’s mouths and they were long past the taste of strawberry chapstick.

He would let George kiss him for as long as he wanted, and he’d let him do it even if he still didn’t know how; but their silly little game certainly made for more than Dream ever thought it would.

He’d play a thousand more times in chase of different outcomes; never the same as the one that ended in dissipated cherry or George’s whisper, because everything he ever wanted was already his.

End Notes

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